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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the increasing prevalence of transfer students and explores problems relating to educational access for minorities, artificial barriers to transfer (curricular, financial, and procedural), and college adjustment. Recommendations are made to both two-year and four-year institutions in the areas of: (1) curriculum, suggesting collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions to develop articulation agreements that enhance transferability of individual courses; (2) academic advisement, proposing the designation of specialized "transfer counselors" and the establishment of transfer resource centers; (3) transfer-student orientation and support programs, focusing on the need for summer transition programs, pre-semester orientations, and peer mentoring programs; (4) faculty involvement, proposing that two-year and four-year college faculty collaborate and that transfer students be assigned faculty mentors; and (5) institutional research and assessment, calling for more effective transfer student tracking, course placement, and student appraisal. The paper concludes with a discussion of how following these recommendations and enhancing the transfer experience can benefit postsecondary institutions. (Contains 49 references.) (EMH)

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The Transfer Transition: A Summary of Key Issues, Target Areas and Tactics for Reform

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THE TRANSFER TRANSITION:
A SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES, TARGET AREAS, AND TACTICS FOR REFORM

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**KEY ISSUES UNDERGIRDING THE NEED FOR MORE CAREFUL ATTENTION TO
THE TRANSFER TRANSITION**

**1. The Prevalence and Increasing Incidence of Transfer Students
in American Higher Education**

* Defining transfer as the movement of a student from one postsecondary institution to another, the number of students now transferring from 2-year to 4-year institutions ("vertical transfers") and from 4-year to 4-year institutions ("horizontal transfers") is increasing. For example, in 1991, more than a million students graduated from 4-year institutions and an estimated 325,000 of them had transferred before graduating. Among these 1991 graduates, barely half were enrolled continuously and full-time at a single institution throughout their undergraduate experience (Institute for Research on Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

* The pool of students who are positioned to make the vertical transfer transition from 2-year to 4-year institutions is substantial. More than 50% of all college freshmen now attend two-year colleges (California Community Colleges, 1994; Parnell, 1986), and student enrollment at 2-year institutions is increasing at a faster rate than it is at 4-year colleges and universities (National Center of Educational Statistics, cited in Giles-Gee, 1994). Simply stated, more 2-year college students will be making the transition to 4-year institutions than at any other time in our nation's history.

* Students matriculating at 2-year colleges with intentions of achieving a baccalaureate degree receive, on average, 15% fewer B.A. degrees, even when controlling for students' SES background, academic ability, high school achievement, and educational aspirations (Astin, 1977, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This phenomenon has been referred to as the "baccalaureate gap" (American Council on Education, 1991).

* Research indicates that approximately one-half of all students who attend community colleges and have aspirations to attain a baccalaureate degree actually go on to transfer to 4-year institutions--with or without an associate degree (American Council on Education, 1991; Pincus & Archer, 1989; Watkins, 1990). Nationally, since the 1970s, the number of students transferring from 2-year to 4-year colleges has decreased

relative to the total community-college enrollment (California Community Colleges, 1994), despite the fact that 57% of community college students earn at least 60 semester hours and 75% earn 49 or more semester hours during their 2-year college experience (Palmer, Ludwig, & Stapleton, 1994). In fact, the transfer rate of community college students who are in vocational-technical programs has been found to equal or exceed that of students who are in general education (transfer-track) programs (Prager, 1988).

Taken together, these findings suggest that there is much room for improving the 2-year to 4-year college transfer rate, and the results also call into question the validity of drawing strong distinctions between community college students as being on either "transfer" or "nontransfer" tracks (Harbin, 1996)--it may be that the baccalaureate degree aspirations of community college students quite malleable and amenable to alteration through institutional interventions.

2. Promoting the Access and Success of Underrepresented Students

* Disproportionately large numbers of underrepresented college students attend community colleges: Over 50% of all minority students in higher education are enrolled at 2-year institutions (ERIC Information Bulletin, 1991; Levitz, 1992; Freund, 1988), despite the fact that they represent less than 25% of all students in American higher education (American Council on Education, 1994). More ethnic and racial minority students are enrolled at community colleges than at all of our nation's 4-year colleges and universities combined (California Colleges, 1994).

Moreover, the number of ethnic and racial minority students (i.e., Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans) who begin higher education at community colleges is increasing for two reasons. (a) Cutbacks in scholarships and grants have increased the number of minority students (who are disproportionately represented in low-income brackets) to enroll in less expensive community colleges (Mortenson, 1990). Reflecting on this finding, McPherson & Shapiro conclude: "These data do seem worrisome. They suggest that the combined effects of tuition increases and limitations on federal student aid may be impairing the ability of low-income students to gain access to institutions other than community colleges" (1995, p. 29).

(b) Demographic projections indicate that minority students will comprise a larger proportion of high school seniors in the next two decades. For example, in 1950, non-Hispanic whites represented approximately 85% of the under-18 population but, by 1990, their representation dropped to 69%; 3 in 10 people under 18 years of age in America now are minority. If present demographic trends continue, non-Hispanic whites will comprise less than 50% of the population by the year 2020 or 2030 (Edgerton, 1991; Miller, 1995).

* The transfer (access) rate of minority students to 4-year institutions is significantly lower than majority students (Angel & Barrera, 1991), despite the fact that the degree aspirations of minority students are very similar to those of majority students (Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1985; College Entrance Examination Board, cited in Richardson & Bender, 1987). It has been estimated that about "half of those minority students entering urban community colleges entertain aspirations for the baccalaureate degree even though fewer than half of those with such aspirations engage in the behaviors associated with successful transfer" (Richardson & Bender, 1987, p. 193).

In their epochal review of more than 2500 studies conducted over a 20-year period, Pascarella and Terenzini reached the following conclusion:

The research published in the last two decades has consistently found--even after holding constant a variety of relevant personal, academic, and family background characteristics and when studying only students in "college transfer" programs--that students entering a four-year institution are substantially more likely than two-year college entrants to persist in their education, to complete a baccalaureate degree, and to attend graduate or professional school. Despite such evidence (about which they are doubtless unaware), significant numbers of high school graduates, their parents, and policy makers continue to believe that attendance at a two-year college followed by transfer to a four-year college for completion of the baccalaureate degree is the low-cost equivalent of the full tour of duty at a four-year institution. This misperception, of course, is particularly damaging among minority and economically disadvantaged groups, for whom the two-year college is the most likely point of entry into the postsecondary educational system It is a cruel irony, then, that while the incremental socioeconomic benefits of a bachelor's degree are greatest for these groups (compared to white or higher socioeconomic groups), the likelihood of their obtaining those benefits is lowest. Failure on the part of educators and public policymakers to acknowledge that two-year and four-year colleges do not lead to the same set of educational and economic outcomes and failure to act on that recognition will mean that unequal educational opportunity will continue, not in the opportunities to participate in higher education but in the opportunities to reap the full benefits of participation. It will mean the perpetuation of the very inequities in educational and social mobility the community college movement was intended to eliminate (1991, pp. 641-642).

* Four-year institutions are much more likely to sponsor minority recruitment programs and to publicize recruitment materials aimed at high schools rather than 2-year colleges--which often enroll

high proportions of minority students (Wechsler, 1989). Moreover, four-year institutions typically place greater recruiting emphasis on academically-oriented, suburban 2-year colleges at which the percentage of minority enrollment is lower than it is at urban 2-year institutions. "As a result, the proportions of black and Hispanic students among transfer students at the junior level often fail to equal the proportions of these groups among first-time freshmen at the same universities (Richardson & Bender, 1987, p. 197).

Minority students who have performed well at urban community colleges may represent a pool of transfer recruits who are relatively "safe bets" for persistence to completion of a bachelor's degree because they have demonstrated their academic commitment and achievement beyond high school. This already-manifested display of postsecondary achievement is more likely to predict their future college success than traditional high school-to-college admission criteria--such as standardized test scores--which have repeatedly been found to be poor predictors of the collegiate performance of African-Americans (Crouse & Trusheim, 1988; Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986), Hispanics (Keller, Deneen, & Magallan, 1991), and native Americans (Beaulieu, 1991).

* In contrast to white and Asian students, decline in unemployment rates for black and Hispanic students is not evident until the baccalaureate degree is attained (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Moreover, nonwhite men derive greater relative occupational benefits from a bachelor's degree than do white men (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

3. Recognizing and Removing "Artificial Barriers" to Transfer

Barriers to successful transfer and smooth transition from 2-year to 4-year institutions include the following.

* Curricular barriers, i.e., confusion & difficulty regarding transferability of courses from 2-year to 4-year colleges, due to: (a) The multiple missions of community colleges which necessitate their offering a wide array of courses serving different purposes and clientele. Some or many of these courses may be non-transferrable to 4-year institutions (e.g., vocational/technical courses, continuing education courses, personal enrichment courses).

(b) No identifiable transfer articulation officer employed at 2-year or 4-year institutions.

(c) Curricular rigidity on the part of 4-year institutions, whose representatives may refuse to accept transfer courses other than those that are virtually identical to their own, or accept transfer courses for elective credit only.

(d) Curricular changes made by 4-year institutions without consideration of their implications for potential transfer

students, or without notification of "feeder" 2-year colleges.

(e) Inter-institutional articulation agreements not adhered to by college deans or department chairs at 4-year institutions.

* Financial Aid Barriers, such as:

- (a) limited or no portability of financial aid for students transferring from one institution to another;
- (b) few or no scholarships earmarked for transfer students;
- (c) acceptance letters sent to transfer students after financial-aid application deadline dates have passed.

* Policy & Procedural Barriers, such as:

(a) Requiring transfer students to take standardized college-admissions tests (e.g., SAT) regardless of the quality of their academic performance at the 2-year institution from which they are transferring.

(b) Requiring transfer students to register last--after all native students, including incoming freshmen; the result: transfer students are "welcomed" to the university with a long list of closed classes.

(c) Providing limited or no on-campus residential opportunities for transfer students; notifying transfers students of acceptance after campus housing application deadline dates have passed; considering transfer students' requests for on-campus housing last--after meeting the requests of all native students; providing little or no special assistance to transfer students in securing off-campus housing.

(d) Completing transfer students' "transcript analysis" after they have already enrolled in their first-semester of classes.

(e) Denying academic honors to community-college transfer students.

4. Facilitating the College Adjustment of Transfer Students during their First-Year Experience at 4-Year Institutions

The need for such facilitation is suggested by the following phenomena.

* "Transfer Shock": a term coined by Hills (1965) to describe the "culture shock" experienced by transfer students who report that 4-year universities have a different institutional culture than 2-year colleges, i.e., a culture that may be less personal or nurturant (Bauer, 1994; Phillippi, 1990), more research-oriented and less student-centered (Richardson & Skinner, 1992), more likely to emphasize selectivity than equal access (Prager, 1988), and which assumes that transfer students do not need special assistance because they've already had collegiate experience (Beckenstein, 1992). At some 4-year institutions, transfer students may be perceived and treated as "interlopers" or "second-class citizens" (Astin, 1975; Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1976; Wilcha & Smith, 1990). Students transferring to research

universities have been found to experience the greatest amount of transfer shock, and they are more likely to be critical of their community college preparations than students transferring to comprehensive universities with a teaching focus (Richardson & Bender, 1987).

* "Transfer Dip": drop in GPA experienced by transfer students during their first semester/year at a 4-year institution, probably due to the aforementioned culture shock as well as different levels of academic expectations and academic support encountered at 4-year institutions (Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985). This dip in GPA is more precipitous for students transferring from urban community colleges (Richardson & Bender, 1987), and for students transferring to more selective 4-year institutions--for example, students transferring to the California State University system experienced an average first-semester grade point drop of .27, while those entering the more selective University of California system experienced an average drop of .57 in GPA (California Community Colleges, 1984).

It should be noted that this initial drop in GPA is typically followed in subsequent semesters by a return to the student's pre-transfer level of academic performance in subsequent semesters. Research on transfer students indicates that their academic performance in upper-division course work usually equals or exceeds that of native students (Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Phillippi, 1990; "Transferring Doesn't Hurt GPAs," 1992).

* Transfer students have an attrition rate at 4-year colleges that is 10-15% higher than native students (Astin, 1975; Fetzters, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

* Students who transfer before completion of the sophomore year have particularly high attrition rates at 4-year colleges and bigger "dips" in GPA than do students who transfer after completing two full years at the institution from which they are transferring (House, 1989).

* Underrepresented students who do manage to transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions have higher attrition rates than do transferring majority students (Richardson & Bender, 1985; Kocher & Pascarella, 1990). For example, among students attending inner-city community colleges who manage to transfer to 4-year institutions, about one-fourth to one-third earn a baccalaureate degree within five years (Richardson & Bender, 1987). This may be due to the usual "transfer shock" that is exacerbated further by the fact that underrepresented students are likely to encounter a 4-year college culture that is much less diverse than the community college culture from which they came.

* Among those transfer students who do persist to graduation, their time to graduation (with a baccalaureate degree) is longer than it is for native students (Menke, 1980, cited in Wecshler,

1989).

* Transferring from a 4-year institution to another 4-year institution ("horizontal" or "lateral" transfer) tends to inhibit baccalaureate degree attainment, regardless of students' race or gender. However, its inhibiting effect is most dramatic for African-American males (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

KEY TARGET AREAS AND TACTICS FOR ADDRESSING THE TRANSFER TRANSITION ISSUE

1. Curricular Strategies

The following strategies represent attempts to promote successful transfer via the curriculum.

* "Enriching" the community-college curriculum to facilitate successful transfer (e.g., offering more transferable "academic" courses; offering a first-semester freshman-orientation or student-success course to proactively prepare students for successful transfer).

* Collaboration between 2-year and 4-year institutions to develop articulation agreements that enhance the transferability of individual courses.

* Replacing traditional "course-by-course" articulation pacts between 2- and 4-year institutions with transfer admission agreements ("TAGS") or transfer admission programs ("TAPS") (a.k.a., "deferred," "simultaneous," "dual" admission agreements, or general education "certification" pacts). These are contracts signed by representatives from a 2- and 4-year institution which stipulate that if a transferring student has completed a prescribed general-education course pattern with a satisfactory GPA at the 2-year institution, she will be admitted automatically to the 4-year college as an upper-division student --e.g., junior status with "block transfer" of all general education courses previously taken at the 2-year institution.

* Co-registration agreements between 2- and 4-year institutions whereby potential transfer students at the 2-year college can enroll simultaneously in courses offered by the 4-year institution. For example, a 4-year college offers courses to nearby community college students, delivered on either campus, so that potential transfer students can obtain "advanced placement" credit).

2. Academic Advisement Services

The following are strategies for promoting successful transfer which focus on improving the visibility and quality of academic advising.

-- Designation and preparation of specialized "transfer advisors" or "transfer counselors" at 2-year and 4-year institutions (e.g., advisors of 2-yr. college students and 4-yr. college advisors or admissions counselors collaborate to recruit potential transfer students, especially underrepresented students).

-- Establishment of a "Transfer Center" or "Transfer Resource Center" to provide informational and advisory support for potential transfer students.

-- Appointment of a "Transfer Director" or "Transfer Coordinator" to provide leadership for, and management of a successful transfer program.

3. Transfer-Student Orientation & Support Programs

The need to complement curricular and academic-advising approaches to promote successful transfer with student orientation-and-support programs is well articulated by Carolyn Prager:

Students who transfer not only move from one academic level to another but also from one distinctively different institutional culture to another, usually to one that they describe as less nurturing than that of the community college. Therefore to improve transfer viability, transfer education must go beyond the search for academic parallelism in freshman and sophomore studies at the two- and four-year levels by including intellectual, social, and cultural preparation for the baccalaureate environment (1988, p. 2)(underlining added).

Such forms of psychosocial preparation and support for transfer students have centered around the following strategies.

-- "Summer Bridge" or "Summer Transition Programs" provided for transfer students during the summer intervening between the conclusion of their 2-year college experience and the beginning of their 4-year college experience.

-- Pre-semester orientation program provided by 4-year colleges for transfer students just prior to their first semester of classes.

-- Transfer-student orientation courses/seminars offered by 4-year institutions for transfer students during their first semester of enrollment.

-- Peer Mentoring Programs: Students who have successfully transferred to a 4-year institution serve as peer models or peer mentors for incoming transfer students.

3. Increasing Faculty Involvement

The following strategies for facilitating successful transfer emanate from what has been termed the "academic model". As Judith Eaton describes it: "The academic model assumes that faculty are central to transfer success. . . . Central to the strategy is academic collaboration among two-and four-year faculty at the departmental, disciplinary, and program levels in the development of curriculum content and expectations for student success (1994, pp. 1-2). Examples of this strategy include the following practices.

* Collaboration between 2- and 4-year college faculty to facilitate successful transfer (e.g., visitations by 4-year college faculty to 2-year institutions to promote students' interest in transferring and majoring in the faculty member's discipline; orientation/transition courses team-taught by 2-year and 4-year college faculty members).

A good illustration of the latter strategy is a program which has been developed by South Mountain Community College in Phoenix. This two-year college collaborates with its major receiver institution, Arizona State University, to offer a university orientation program which includes a three-credit course designed jointly by faculty at both institutions (Donovan & Schaier-Peleg, 1988).

* Collaboration between academic department/division chairs at 2- and 4-year colleges to promote transferability of pre-major courses and to develop discipline-based articulation agreements. As Margaret King notes:

Whenever possible, at both two and four-year colleges, we should encourage discussion among those responsible for course content to determine if, in fact, there are significant differences between courses and what can be done to resolve those differences. Often, simply by meeting one another and beginning to discuss concerns, barriers may be lowered (1994, p. 5).

* Faculty mentors for transfer students (e.g., mentoring relationships between 4-yr. college faculty and 2-yr. college students to facilitate a smooth transfer transition).

* Faculty development efforts at 2-year institutions designed to promote faculty behavior inside and outside the classroom that elevates students' educational aspirations and desire to go on to complete the baccalaureate degree.

4. Engaging in More Effective Institutional Research & Assessment

In its national policy statement on transfer education, the National Center for Academic Advisement & Transfer makes nine major recommendations for transfer, one of which states that 2- and 4-year institutions should establish "formal written transfer goals [and create] an institutional information system that will generate the data necessary to assess the progress toward those goals according to readily understandable definitions" (Eaton, 1992, p. 78).

The following strategies are consistent with this recommendation.

* Developing systems for successfully tracking transfer students who transition from 2- to 4-year institutions for the purpose of assessing their retention and academic performance (without violating the Buckley amendment).

* Developing accurate indices or measures of successful transfer (e.g., acceptance rates, subsequent retention, academic performance, and time to graduation).

* Effective entry testing and course placement procedures for transfer students.

* Assessing differences in levels of college satisfaction and gains in academic achievement of transfer students relative to native students.

* Assessing the transfer rates of student subpopulations (e.g., vocational-technical track students vs. transfer-oriented students).

* Assessing the transfer and retention rates of students transferring as majors in different academic disciplines (e.g., Natural Sciences vs. Humanities).

* Assessing the impact of freshman-orientation courses or freshman seminars taught at 2-year colleges on students' likelihood of transfer and subsequent success after transferring to a 4-yr. institution.

* Assessing the impact of transfer-orientation courses or transfer seminars offered by 4-year colleges for transfer students (e.g., impact on student retention, academic performance, and time to graduation).

**HOW INSTITUTIONS MAY BENEFIT FROM GREATER ATTENTION TO
THE TRANSFER TRANSITION EXPERIENCE**

* For two-year institutions:

1. Assessment of institutional effectiveness would be enhanced via closer examination of transfer rates (e.g., via establishment of efficient "student tracking" systems and accurate indices of successful transfer).

2. Responding more effectively to issues of institutional accountability, quality, and funding which are now being tied more closely to student retention and transfer rates, rather than total number of students enrolled.

3. Greater attention by 2-year colleges to promoting successful transfer would better serve the economic prospects of its students, particularly underrepresented students, whose numbers are now disproportionately large at community colleges--institutions which have historically served disadvantaged students as part of their egalitarian (open-access) mission. The differential economic advantage associated with completion of the baccalaureate degree, relative to an associate degree, is now increasing, and this relative economic advantage of the baccalaureate degree is greater for underrepresented students (e.g., African-American males) than it is for majority students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

* For four-year institutions, greater attention to promoting successful transfer may have the following payoffs.

1. Facilitating the transfer transition may facilitate enrollment management at 4-year colleges by enabling these institutions to offset enrollment declines stemming from smaller numbers of entering high-school graduates, or from attrition of enrolled students during their freshman and sophomore years.

The rising costs of higher education are causing beginning college students to opt for the local community college as a low-cost alternative for the first two years of college, but these same cost-conscious students may be very willing to pay higher tuition for just two years of college--their final two years--at a four-year institution.

2. Interest in the transfer transition may encourage 4-year institutions to cultivate a new, more diverse pool of potential applicants who can contribute to the diversity of their student body. For example, prospective transfer students at community colleges tend to be more diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, SES, and age relative to the traditional recruitment pool of high-school applicants.

3. Greater attention to transfer students may stimulate 4-year institutions' development of new recruitment and retention strategies designed specifically for transfer students, and particularly for underrepresented students at two-year institutions. For instance, selective 4-year colleges would be able to offer "deferred admission" to high-risk underrepresented students who would otherwise be rejected, if they can first demonstrate their academic capabilities and build their academic skills at a two-year institution. In this fashion, 4-year institutions can effectively recruit and accept at-risk students without incurring the risk of early attrition and the expense of remedial or developmental education.

4. Interest in promoting successful transfer should stimulate inter-institutional collaboration with area community colleges and the improvement of university-community ("town-gown") relations.

5. Attention to the transfer transition would encourage 4-year institutions to see transfer students as an opportunity--rather than as a liability, resulting in their becoming active--rather than passive recipients of transfer students through intentional programming designed to address institutional factors that interfere with the successful transition, integration, and retention of transfer students.

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